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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001782

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMCA](#) [KMPI](#) [YM](#) [DOMESTIC POLITICS](#) [DEMOCRATIC REFORM](#)

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARIANS SEEK TO LIMIT EXECUTIVE INTERFERENCE

REF: SANAA 426

Classified By: CDA Nabeel Khoury for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. On June 11 the Yemeni Parliament passed new by-laws aimed at reforming its infrastructure. Among other reforms, the bill would reduce the Speaker of Parliament's term from six years to two. Ambassador discussed the new bill with several reformist MPs on June 14. The legislators commented on term limits and the challenges they face in the bill's implementation. They also appealed for continued USG assistance to help Yemen become a "true" democracy. End Summary.

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New By-Laws Passed in Parliament  
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2. (U) On June 11 Parliament unanimously passed the "Internal By-Laws of Parliament" bill. The legislation, authored by a Special Parliamentary Committee on By-laws, codifies parliamentary procedures and reassigns some powers of the Presidium to committees. The Presidium, Parliament's four person governing body chaired by Speaker al-Ahmar, largely controls the legislative agenda. Although mostly technical, some provisions of the bill are expected to help insulate Parliament from executive pressure. These include amendments to: empower legislative committees to subpoena ministers without the consent of the Presidium; mandate a secret ballot for Parliamentary leadership positions; create a pension system giving MPs benefits equal to ministers; and, grant additional independent budgeting power to committees.

3. (C) For the bill to become law, either President Saleh must sign it or allow sixty days to pass without his signature. He may also veto the bill or request certain revisions. The most controversial provision decreases the Speaker of Parliament's term from six years to two. Opposition Islah party leader and Paramount Sheikh of Yemen, Abdullah al-Ahmar, currently holds the position. An on-again-off-again public war of words between President Saleh and Sheikh al-Ahmar, sparked in February when al-Ahmar publicly criticized Saleh's economic program, has left relations tense between the two leaders (reftel). The GPC insisted on reducing a proposed three-year term to two, leading many to conclude that the two-year limit is a message from Saleh to al-Ahmar. According to Director of the NDI Democracy Development Center, Dr. Saad Talib, the powerful Speaker initially reacted with anger and "begged" various members of Parliament to vote against the law. After the law passed, al-Ahmar boycotted sessions of Parliament for a week.

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Parliamentarians on the Two-Year Term Limits  
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4. (C) Ambassador spoke with seven MPs who helped author the bill from the three major political parties: The ruling GPC; opposition Islamic-based Islah; and, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). Ali Ashal, an Islahi MP from Abyan who serves on the By-laws committee, agreed with the others that the length of the Speaker's term was by far the most contentious provision of the bill. Ashal claimed that the clear intent of the By-Laws Committee was to reduce the Speaker's term to three years rather than two, however, "the GPC clearly had other plans." Abd al-Karim Aslami, another GPC MP who sits on the committee, confided that his party intends to hold the two-year limit over al-Ahmar's head in the lead up to the 2006 presidential elections. "The GPC can now pressure Islah not to endorse an opposition candidate," he said.

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Help Us Form a Democracy  
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5. (C) The Parliamentarians all agreed that Yemen requires international assistance to become a functioning democracy. "Our structures are still very primitive," said Aslami, suggesting to Ambassador that he "call it like you see it" when speaking with high-level ROYG officials. Islah MP Abdul Razik Hajri echoed Aslami's call, urging Ambassador to assist Yemen in democratization efforts and make sure that there is a "transparency in cooperation." Ashal commented that Yemen is a state where the person is more powerful than the

institution and, "that needs to change." GPC MP Sakhr al-Wagih concluded that political reform required "real political will."

16. (C) Comment: Although Sheikh Ahmar will no doubt try to influence Saleh, the new bill seems likely to become law. If implemented, it will weaken somewhat the power of the Presidium and the Speaker. While not always on good terms with President Saleh, al-Ahmar has struck deals with him in the past to help "produce" legislation out of Parliament. Whether wielding power in the name of the state or tribal power, the weakening of al-Ahmar is likely to encourage individual MPs to speak and act more independently in the future. End Comment.  
Khoury